WHIRRAKEE

January/February 2007 Vol. 28 No. 1

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552
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	(an assistant's position for the syllabus organiser is still vacant)		
Librarian	Diana Collier	31 Milroy Street, Bendigo	5443 0137
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Whirrakee contact	Sabine Wilkens	82 Somerville Street, Bendigo e-mail: s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au	5443 2797

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The invited speaker at general meetings starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper.
If a workshop is held prior to the meeting, it will be advertised and it usually starts at 7.00pm.
The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Matthew Comer, Bill Holsworth, Darren White, Bob Ruddick, Rod Orr, Jan Orr, Peter Ellis, Ben Goonan, Richard Goonan, Anthony Sheean, Liz Graham

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. In addition to local excursions, campouts are held several times each year, usually coinciding with long weekends or holiday periods.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one active group that meets regularly (the Fauna Study Group) and other groups that meet at irregular intervals.

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.
Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observers Group: This group has field excursions and the occasional lecture evening. Please consult the *Whirrakee* for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5449 3479.
To propose meetings or excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 28, No. 1, January/February 2007

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.

Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note:
Every time, following Rob and Cynthia Watkins' talk at our meetings about Lord Howe Island, I have been planning and wanting to go there more than anywhere else. Now it was Tom Burton's turn to make me yearn for such a visit. The article on page 4 makes it sound so perfect and ideal a place, that I will not rest until I have seen it myself. However, holidays are a thing of the past for most people now…the year is slowly getting into gear again – so don't forget that our meetings resume in February with our members' slide night (see back page).

Front Page Illustration – Photographer: Rod and Jan Orr

This photo, taken through a telescope, is of the Spotted Crake at Kennington Reservoir. It's a small Coot-like bird (less than half the size and attractively spotted and banded) and is a really unusual sighting for everyone we've told about it - that's probably because they are usually so furtive and seldom seen out of dense cover. This little bird forages around on the muddy edge of the island in the Reservoir. Jan and Rod are now experts with this interesting photographic technique, so if your subjects are shy and often far away, the Orrs will tell you how this is done. Such photos look great!

Short Notices

Identifying Growling Grass Frogs and others

Ben Kroker from the North Central CMA Waterwatch team is planning some frog surveys involving community members. The basic idea is to have anyone who is interested learn to identify frogs calls, so they can tell what is in their back yard.

Ben is collecting names of interested people – if there are enough, he'll run a training/ information session one night. The sooner the better, as frogs like the warm weather, especially the Growling Grass Frog, which is the main focus of this survey.

Contact details for Ben are:
Ben Kroker, Landcare Coordinator,
City Of Greater Bendigo
15 Hopetoun Street / PO Box 733, Bendigo VIC 3552
mobile: 0427 853 545 / tel. 5434 6393
e-mail: b.kroker@bendigo.vic.gov.au

Control burn planned at LaTrobe University bushland – BFNC suggestions welcome

by Sabine Wilkens

The Building and Grounds Department at LaTrobe University, Bendigo have been advised by DSE and CFA staff to carry out a fuel reduction burn in order to create a 40m fire break.
This burn will take place during the winter semester break 2007 (June/July).

The area to be burnt is from the top of the South ridge bushland reserve behind the Ironbark Centre, going toward One Tree Hill Regional Park. The strip to be cleared is between the dam and the Units accommodation.

Tim Hall (Building and Grounds LTU) is wondering if the Bendigo Field Nats want to do any kind of surveying there before and after the burn. Had we known this last year, my second year ecology class could have done such a survey, say in Spring 2006 and compared with subsequent springs after the burn.
We can still do some sampling before the burn and after (at some other comparable time) but if anybody has any suggestions as to how to make something more of this event, please let me know
(Sabine Wilkens ph. 54 432797 h)

SEANA campout March 2007

hosted by Geelong Field Naturalists Club
location: Forrest, in the central Otways.

Booking must be early:
A $30 deposit/participant is now due. Make cheques payable to SEANA Inc Autumn 2007 campout, post to ER Southcombe, 4 Peary St, Belmont 3216.

River Red Gum Forest Investigation

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) has recently completed an inventory of the land use of River Red Gum Forests.

This document, called the 'River Red Gum Forest Investigation' was available late last year for public discussion and comment. The first round of submissions was called for by December 7. Now, a set of draft recommendations will be drawn up by VEAC, and these will be available for public comment as well....

....continued on page 8

Lord of the Isles

Author and Photographer: Thomas Burton

The tour operator's t-shirt read, "No snakes, No mozzies, No locks". It could equally have read also "No cats", "No eucalypts", "No acacias", "No sparrows", "No honeyeaters", and if it had not been for a concerted and expensive effort, "No Woodhens". For this was Lord Howe Island (LHI), 500 or so kilometres east of Port Macquarie, where we spent a wonderful week in December.

The "No locks" was disconcerting initially, until we realized that on an island with a population of fewer than 400 residents and 400 tourists there could be room for a lot of trust, and that we were not alone in lacking any sort of lock on our unit. The "No snakes" (shameful though it be for a naturalist to say so) made walking through palm forests care-free; and the absence of the sweat-flies, mozzies and hot winds that cause discomfort at home made bush-walking just pure pleasure. Even walking on roads is made pleasurable by the fact that there are few cars and a 25 km/h speed limit. LHI is a walker's paradise.

So that is what there is none of on Lord Howe Island; what is there some of? For some reason – philanthropy maybe, or wind conditions – the Dash 8 plane that took us there did a flight around the island before landing, to give all of the 36 passengers an excellent view of the most beautiful sub-tropical isle one could ever wish to see. In the midst of dark-blue ocean stands this rich green, crescent-shaped island, with cliffs at its northern end, towering twin volcanic peaks at its southern end, and on the western side, a pale green lagoon occupying the concavity of the crescent. One thing LHI has in abundance is scenery, with superb vistas wherever you are on the island.

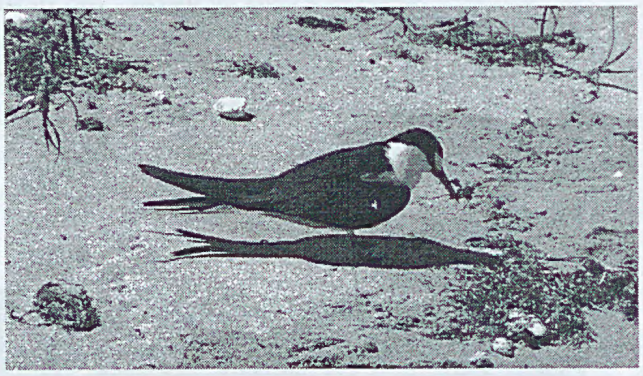
LHI also has a number of endemic birds, and those that aren't endemic are fun enough. On our first evening, we walked down the splendid fish dinner we had at one of the few restaurants, flashing our torches, because street lighting is limited. Our stroll took us to Ned's Beach. As we approached the beach we heard what sounded like rhinos crashing their way through the Kentia palms and sallywoods. Soon our torches located the source of the din – Fleshy-foot Shearwaters on their way to their nesting burrows. Some had landed on the tops of the trees, and just crashed down through the palms to the forest floor, making an awful racket; others had landed on the road, and were running to their nests, flapping their wings in their haste. All shearwater species seem to attract the name "Mutton Bird", because their fattened-up young have made meals for sailors. Raiding the nests on LHI must have been so much easier and safer than raiding the Short-tailed Shearwater nests on the Bass Strait islands – no snakes.

A Fleshy-foot Shearwater (Photo by TB)

As we continued in the darkness onto the beach our torches picked out beautiful White Terns sitting on outer branches of the greywoods and sallywoods. They nest out there … sort of: they don't make a nest. The egg is balanced on the branch, and when it hatches, the chick balances too. Unsurprisingly, the mortality of eggs and chicks is high, but the terns remain

abundant. To watch pairs of these elegant birds, pure white apart from their jet black eyes and eyebrows and feet, carrying out synchronized aerial manoeuvres against a pure azure sky is to experience a sort of ecstasy.

More seabirds nest on and near Ned's Beach. Sooty Terns by the thousand nested on the beach just above high water, on the adjacent cliffs, and in huge numbers in a corner of the steep cow paddock at the top of the cliff. One evening, we watched as a few cows blundered into the nesting colony, endangering eggs and chicks, feeding unconcernedly within swarms of harrying terns. Sooty Terns nest in many places on the island.



A Sooty Tern on North Bay

Other seabirds we saw nesting included Masked Boobies, the biggest seabirds on LHI, nesting out on Roach Island, the largest of the nearby Admiralty group; the Red-tailed Tropicbird, at Malabar in the north and the flanks of Mt Gower in the south; the Grey Ternlet (a lovely tern with a butterfly-like flight) with the tropicbirds on Mt Gower, whose seaward flank drops almost vertically with few ledges the whole 875 m from its top into the sea; Black and Common Noddies; and my favourite, the Black-winged Petrel, whose aerobatics in the wind near Clear Place on the eastern cliffs of the island took our breath away.

Nesting Black Noddies

That t-shirt could have said, "No gulls"; and before people introduced cats, and rats got onto the island after a shipwreck on the north coast, "No nest predators" would have been appropriate. Cats are gone. Destruction of feral cats, and elimination of cats as pets have removed that menace, but rats are a bigger problem. A feature of our walks was the number of rat baiting stations on the island. I didn't detect much optimism about the elimination of rats, but control measures seem to be working.

The land birds included the endemic Golden Whistler sub-species – I couldn't really tell the difference from ours; the endemic Silvereye – a bit bigger, and longer-billed than ours, very numerous and very versatile, being the only small bird, and having a monopoly of the leaf-gleaning and nectar-feeding franchises; and the endemic Pied Currawong, which features less white than ours, and has a much bigger beak.

Pied Currawong

While the t-shirts could have added, "No sparrows", there are a number of introduced species (Blackbirds and Song Thrushes, particularly); and a number of species seem to have introduced themselves, notably the very common Magpie-larks and the Buff-breasted Rails.

Of course, the most famous LHI land bird is the Woodhen. This flightless species was virtually extinct about 30 years ago, when three pairs, about half of the known breeding population, were brought down from Mt Gower, their last stronghold. The breeding program was a great success, and Woodhens can now be found over much of the island. Or so I was told.

By our second-last day I still had not seen one, and nurtured one last hope, a guided walk to Little Island, at the foot of Mt Lidgbird (775 m), where they were said to be in large numbers. However, when I awoke on that second-last morning, I heard a row going on outside our room. I followed the noise to a lawn. As I rounded a corner leading to the lawn, I saw in turn a Magpie-lark standing on the grass, a Rail, and finally, there, unmistakable, tucked in the corner of the lawn, a Woodhen. As though they had been just waiting for an audience to turn up, the three birds then sprang into action. First the Woodhen spread its reddish wings and charged and routed the Magpie-lark, which flew away, squawking its alarm call; then the Woodhen charged the Rail, which fled on foot. The Woodhen, clearly now Boss of the Lawn, relaxed, its wings now resting against its tan body, and it proceeded to forage all around the lawn, walking right up to me as though I were invisible, then continuing on its way. Eventually, I left to get my camera, and, of course, the Woodhen had gone when I returned.

After that, I saw Woodhens everywhere, even right down in the "CBD" – a local joke, because there are only about three shops there – and on the Little Island walk I even managed to squeeze off a photo.

There are many activities besides bird-watching and strolling. How about a climb into the cloud-forest atop Mt Gower? This is a truly terrifying climb, requiring a guide and ropes, but apparently worthwhile for its array of unique plants. One of our new friends, as scared of heights as I am, went up … and, afraid to look, came down with her eyes closed, relying on the guide to tell her where to place her feet. Brave, inconvenient woman! There is a small but well set up museum, with a program of excellent talks delivered by very good photographers and naturalists. Snorkelling in the lagoon is first class (but as novices, we swallowed more than we saw), and at Ned's Beach you can stand knee-deep in warm water and feed Bluefish, Parrot Fish, Emperor Fish, huge Kingfish, Drummers, little Sand Mullet, and even Galapagos Sharks.

One issue that needs addressing on the island is the guilty pleasure of feeding wild animals, like these fish. One tour guide routinely collects and feeds longhorn beetle larvae to the Pied Currawongs; another guide calls up Woodhens and feeds them for the tourists. There are practical problems here – we heard of an instance of Pied Currawongs mugging walkers, and an aesthetic problem too: Woodhens' being treated like domestic fowl is demeaning, and devalues an encounter.

LHI offers some specific tours that may be of interest to Field Nats. All run for a week: including a (cheap) winter weeding trip; birding tours; and an introduction to the ecology of the rainforest. The guide is an expert, and people we spoke to were very enthusiastic about their experience. Information about these tours is available on the web.

LHI is not a cheap place to get to, and food and accommodation are expensive, but it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, as beautiful and relaxing a place as any I have encountered, and a naturalist's paradise.

The Lord Island Woodhen

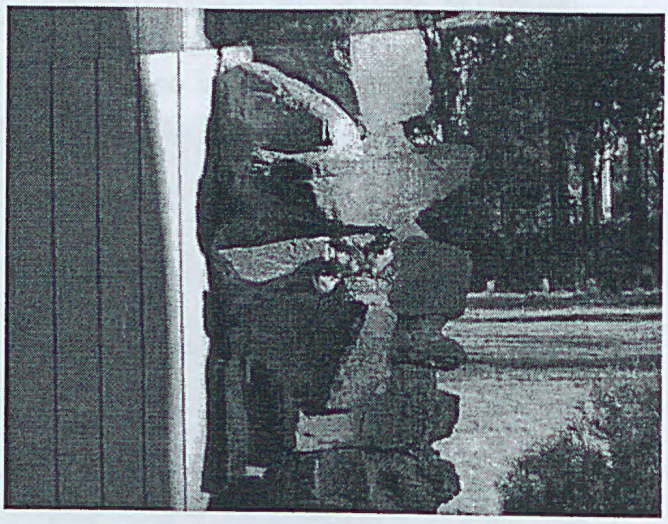
"He who giveth taketh away.... a new meaning to hygiene"

by Karen Thomas

Well another year passes and the willies who adopted our household are back at it again with fierce determination to be parents.

After checking out last year's site in the tree outside our bedroom, they decided it was good enough to start there again ...and rightly so rearing three broods last year, it was a productive spot!!!! Unfortunately though for the willies, the White Plume Honeyeaters who they co- habited with last year had already built their nest and chose not to be so accommodating this time, evicting them.

Not to be deterred from losing such great spot they moved around the corner and set up shop on the front stone wall .... conveniently for us in front of a window; in full view to all .....a site to make any peregrine turn in its grave. So we got the pleasure once again to spy on their nest building antics.



The best nursery spot? But perfect for being watched from a bedroom window... (photo by KT)

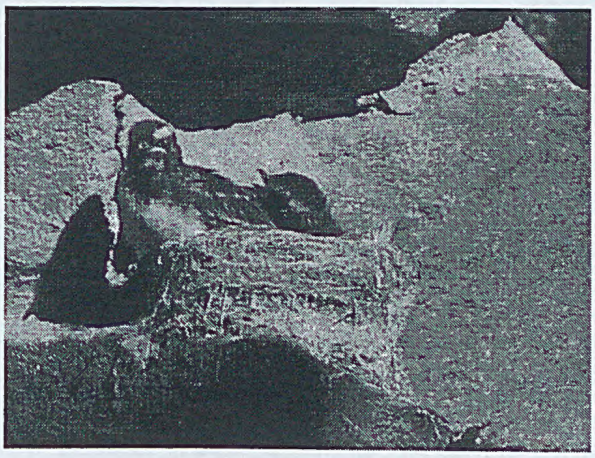
Spider webs, leg beating, the same recipe for producing a beautifully woven cup... just the right size for 3 babies once again.....and we weren't disappointed....3 eggs laid, hatched and fed...with toilet hygiene to make any sapien parent thankful they are not of avian nature. Like clockwork mum and dad fly in with a tasty morsel for one end and are presented on cue at the other for a somewhat manufactured version of the morsel...this to be promptly disposed of...one can only ponder the thought of where its taken ...hmmmm????

This year we had the delight of witnessing a willet's first flight...like a novice bungy jumper ...3 times it perched on the edge only to nestle promptly back in the cup; despite the incessant chatter from mum and dad. Fourth time all systems go, this little fella wasn't mucking around ...it was off to the top of a tree nearby in full flight.....no training flight for this one...well how could it really.. .stone walls don't grow branches?

The nest is getting rather crowded...

So round one is down with two to go if last year's record is anything to go by and we are not being let down...2 weeks later three eggs appeared....but oh dear.... the sun has moved (*sorry astronomers.....the earth*). One has to question this year's choice of sites as they battle the hot afternoon sun..... hard boiled eggs could be on the menu. Once again they live up to that Willie determination ..... *perhaps there's more to their name than meets the eye*? ...

In 35 degrees, full sun, with black bodies baking each took turn standing over the eggs, beak agape and wagging *or maybe fanning* that gorgeous tail.



Willie wagtail babies looking very hot...

BUT!.....we just couldn't help ourselves, with the failed construction *then later deconstruction of* a cardboard visor taped to the stone wall ..... couldn't they see that you just had to fly under it !!!! but it wasn't for the want of trying..... emulating their never give up attitude however, we are determined to help.....so if you see a strange coloured beach umbrella in a most unlikely place, you'll understand !!!!!!!

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continued from page 3...

The document released last year can be purchased from 'Information Victoria' in Collins Street, Melbourne ($10.- plus postage). It is also available for public viewing in libraries and DSE offices in the study area (this comes down to Tang Tang which contain some sites of particular interest for BFNC members) and it can also be downloaded from the web from www.veac.vic.gov.au

However, watch out for the publication date of the new document, after which your input is sought once again.

From the Mailbag
Author: Elaine Mathison

Each month the club receives a number of newsletters and magazines: some by subscription and some in exchange for Whirrakee. These are available from the club library.

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THE VICTORIAN NATURALIST(FNCV)
August 2006

This issue features a number of articles dealing with the subject of bryophytes ie mosses, liverworts and hornworts. These include:

- A preliminary study of bryophytes and invertebrates of the soil crusts in the Little Desert National Park and surrounds
- Melbourne's marvellous mosses
- Epiphytes on Nothofagus cunninghamii and Eucalyptus regnans in a Victorian cool temperate rainforest
- Bryophyte distribution in Blackwood forests of the Otway Ranges

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PARKWATCH(VNPA)
December 2006

In "The Nature of Climate Change" VNPA Director Charlie Sherwin suggests that "the challenge of protecting the earth's climate system is inextricably linked to the protection of bushland and ecosystems".

"Our Melting Mountain" deals with the results of a warm winter on Mt Kosciuzko, one of the worst snow seasons on record. Mountain Pygmy-possums woke early from hibernation but their spring food source, the Bogong Moth, hadn't arrived. Other wildlife was similarly affected.

"Gondwana Link WA" reports on an ambitious project in south-western Western Australia to create links through an area devastated by extensive clearing over the last 50 years. VNPA, in conjunction with other state conservation groups, is working toward something similar in Victoria.

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THE BIRD OBSERVER(BOCA)
June 2006

"A bird survey on Norfolk Island" reports on participation in this project which had gained funding from the Commonwealth Envirofund. The area surveyed included the nearby islands and rocky outcrops.

"Magical avian moments" describes features of the BOCA Centenary Tagalong to far north Queensland, beginning at Broadwater Creek. More than 250 species were seen in a wide variety of habitats.

Bird observations include:

- Bush Stone-curlews
- Noisy Scrub-bird heard in the Kimberley
- Sad saga of the Brown Honeyeaters
- Breeding Sacred Kingfishers

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Also received recently:

*Geelong Naturalist (Geelong FNC)
December 2006
*The Ballarat Naturalist(Ballarat FNC)
December 2006
*Castlemaine Naturalist (C'Maine FNC)
December 2006
*Field Nats News(FNCV)
December 2006
*Sun-Nat News(Sunraysia FNC)
Oct-Dec 2006
*Volunteer(Threatened Birds Network)

*Natural Heritage

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Animals in Myth and Religion

This is a terrific-looking summer program of public lectures offered by the staff and post-graduate students of the Philosophy and Religious Studies discipline at La Trobe University, Bendigo. Some lectures have already finished but there are plenty of interesting ones left.

The venue is the La Trobe Visual Arts Centre, View Street, Bendigo.
No registration necessary. All sessions are gold coin donation at the door. Tea and coffee is provided.
For more information e-mail Rod Blackhirst at: r.blackhirst@latrobe.edu.au

Fourth Session
Wednesday Evening 7.30pm-9.30pm 7th February
The Iconography of the Elephant
Of all animals elephants are known to mourn their dead. The elephant is a sacred creature in many religious traditions. In this session Dorothy Avery will present an overview of the sacredness of elephants with particular reference to elephants in religious iconography, especially in the Hindu tradition.
Presenter: Mrs Dorothy Avery

Fifth Session
Friday Evening 7.30pm-9.30pm 9th February
Barefooted Vegetarians in the Western Christian Tradition: a Carmelite perspective
The Carmelite Order, one of the oldest in the Christian tradition, takes its name and origin from Mt Carmel in modern day Israel. Carmelites, like Carthusians, Cistercians and some of the other older Orders, do not eat meat. Carmelites who follow the C16th reform of Teresa of Avila are called 'discalced'; they are barefooted. In this session, Wendy Brennan, will look at the background and history of the Carmelites, these 'barefooted vegetarians'.
Presenter: Ms Wendy Brennan

Sixth Session
Sunday afternoon 2pm-4pm 11th February
Animals in Paganism & Wicca
Animals have a central place in the old nature-based religions. In this session David Waldron will explore the use, understanding and symbolism of animals in the European pagan and wicca traditions.
Presenter: Dr David Waldron

Seventh Session
Wednesday Evening 7.30pm-9.30pm 14th February
Oh No! Clashing with BFNC meeting…..
Plato on Man and Pig: Plato's Animal Morphology
Presenter: Dr Roger Sworder

Eighth Session
Friday Evening 7.30pm-9.30pm 16th February
Animals in Christian Symbolism
Presenter: Dr Brian Coman

Ninth Session
Sunday afternoon 2pm-4pm 18th February
The Language of the Birds Presenter: Mr James Larking

Tenth Session
Wednesday Evening 7.30pm-9.30pm 21st February
Do Animals Have Souls? An Epicurean Perspective
Presenter: Mr John Penwill

Eleventh Session
Friday Evening 7.30pm-9.30pm 23rd Feb.
In Defence of Dogs
Presenter: Ms Jan Porter

Twelfth Session
Sunday afternoon 2pm-4pm 25th February
Legends of the Buraq: An Islamic Bestiary
Presenter: Dr Rod Blackhirst

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meetings

Wednesday, February 14 7.30pm
For February's meeting, we usually show members' slides of holiday activities which incorporate Natural History of some sort – We now have our data projector, so we can also show members' digital photos.
Members are asked to select their best 10 digital photos and to bring them along in a form that can be shown (on CD or saved on a memory stick) - we will then do our best to show them. Photographic slides may also be brought along as we are still able to use the slide projector.

Wednesday, March 14 7.30pm
Leigh Mitchell from the North Central Catchment Management Authority will talk about the work of the NCCMA on Frog ID and community education about frogs.

Fauna Group
This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm.

Fauna Excursions
Every Friday morning starting at around 9 to 9:30, the Fauna Group inspects nest boxes in the Spring Gully area. The excursions are led by Maurie Lewis, 16 Vains St. Golden Square. Phone 0407 427 179 or 5442 1813. Phone Maurie to confirm exact departure times and location. If you don't phone but go directly to Maurie's house and find nobody at the house between 9 and 9:30 then the excursion is not on.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.
W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

SEANA campout March 2007
hosted by Geelong Field Naturalists Club
location: Forrest, in the central Otways.
Booking must be early:
A $30 deposit/participant is now due. Make cheques payable to SEANA Inc Autumn 2007 campout, post to ER Southcombe, 4 Peary St, Belmont 3216.

New Edition of Box Ironbark CD
The new edition of 'Plants and Animals of the Box-Ironbark Area of Central Victoria' is still available at the usual price of $ 50.

...and **Wildlife of the Box Ironbark Country by Chris Tzaros** is also still available at $ 30.-.
Please contact Bill Holsworth if you are interested in purchasing one of these.

Bendigo Field Naturalists on the web
Any comments about the site are most welcome
http://communitysites.impulse.net.au/bendigofieldnaturalists/fnats.html